

October 26, 2001

Dear Selected District Superintendents:

High Priority Schools Grant Program

The Governor and the Legislature have provided a unique opportunity for low performing schools and their districts to participate in a new program to raise student achievement. Recently enacted legislation (Assembly Bill 961, Chapter 747, Statutes of 2001) provides additional resources for districts to help underperforming schools.

The High Priority Schools Grant (HPSG) program contained in AB 961 will provide \$400 per student for participating schools to implement reforms to improve student performance while setting accountability standards for schools and districts. The legislative intent of the HPSG program is to ensure that the lowest performing schools in California participate in an intervention program to significantly improve student learning.

I invite the schools in your district that rank in decile 1 according to the statewide Academic Performance Index (API) and schools with asterisked API scores that would put them in decile 1, to participate in this important program. We must ensure that all students are able to achieve their fullest potential. By providing you with the additional fiscal resources in AB 961, we are taking another step towards maximizing student success.

Attached is information to assist you in making a decision about participation in the HPSG program, including a one-page application to complete and return to the Department. I also suggest you read the legislation. The Governor has requested additional legislation to clarify some current ambiguities in the law, so I urge you to follow any changes that may occur in the next legislative session.

By receiving this letter, you will need to hold a public hearing to consider whether or not to apply for the HPSG program. Be aware that this program has very tight timelines. An application for school planning grants and/or a commitment to participate in the implementation phase is due January 15, 2002. Questions may be addressed to the School Reform Assistance Office at iiusp@cde.ca.gov or by phone at (916) 657-3803.

Lastly, let me note that some superintendents who avoided applying for additional resources under II/USP, indicated they believed that the accountability movement in California would be short-lived. I believe that is short-sighted. Accountability is here to stay. The only question that remains is whether you will seek additional resources for your lowest performing schools or go it on your own. Either way, the performance of the schools in question is unacceptably low. We sincerely hope you will proceed apace.

I look forward to working with you for the benefit of California's students.

Sincerely,

DELAINE EASTIN
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

DE:bb

cc: Honorable Darrell Steinberg
Honorable John Vasconcellos